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ABSTRACT

A study examined children's writing development in two kindergarten classrooms during the course of a school year, with particular consideration to context, teacher-provided support, and characterization of students' writing. The study was based on the theoretical concepts of writing-as-play and writing-as-exploration, as well as emergent literacy theory and a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning. Subject were 8 children in a morning kindergarten class and 9 children in an afternoon class. Findings related to classroom context suggest: primary teacher support was a post-writing strategy utilizing students' zones of proximal development; teachers made little intervention to improve student's writing quality through modeled or shared writing; very little group interaction or writing audience was observed; and journal writing was the second most frequent literacy event after read aloud. Regarding children's writings, findings suggest: some children made modest growth while others made little or no growth; large variations in writing fluency were present; topics came from students' own life or school experiences; drawing was a predominant feature of all writings; children developed an early repertoire of correctly-spelled conventional words (i.e. "mom," "dad," "love," "you"); and extended repetition was the primary learning pattern for children with varying levels of progress. Contains 14 references; a coding scheme for analysis of writing, a data overview chart, and 4 example charts are attached. (EF)

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Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine children's writing development in two kindergarten classrooms during the course of a school year. The following questions guided this study: (a) What are the contexts in which kindergartners write? (b) What types of scaffolding do the teachers provide to support kindergartners' writing development? And (c) What characterizes the writing produced by kindergartners in these contexts?

Perspective / Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework undergirding this study draws from the body of research on writing, emergent literacy and socioculturalism. Writing research suggests that children learn best in communities of learners which provide choice, authentic purposes, and real audiences for their writing (Calkins, 1994, 1986; 1983; Cramer, 1978; Graves, 1994; 1983). One notion which plays a role in this study is writing-as-play (Graves, 1981). Children's play-like experimentation with drawings, letters, words and materials results, in time, in active construction of meaning. Another important notion is "writing as exploration" (MacGillivray, 1994) in which children explore their "selves" and their world through writing. Children are able to draw upon the multiple social worlds in which they live and interact, and utilize this rich knowledge base as they write (Dyson, 1989). Young writers also borrow from their early literature experiences as they utilize story book language, story grammar, and various conventions of print (Calkins, 1994; Clay, 1991; Dahl & Freppon, 1995).

Research in emergent literacy (Clay, 1975; Sulzby & Teale, 1991) also provides insight into the early writing experiences of children. Sulzby has defined emergent literacy as, "the reading and writing behaviors that precede and develop into conventional literacy" (Sulzby, 1989). Within the emergent literacy perspective, children are influenced by their earliest exposures to print whether environmental, functional, or literature-based. Children's earliest explorations with writing provide a context for students to develop knowledge of writing as a meaning-making process, and to explore and develop sound-symbol relationships through the use of invented spellings (Bissex, 1980; Sulzby, Barnhart, & Heishima, 1989; Gentry, 1981; Goodman & Wilde, 1992). This is also a time when young writers explore a variety of forms of writing such as narrative, lists, signs, directions, and reports (Bissex, 1980). As young children draw, they often discover the topic about which they will write. Talking with peers, a teacher, or an adult also influences children's writing (Calkins, 1994; 1986).

This study is grounded in a sociocultural approach to teaching and learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The social milieu in which a child learns plays a crucial role in development of literacy knowledge and understandings. These understandings come in large measure from their social interactions with significant others (adult

connections, evidence of teacher scaffolding, etc. Triangulation of data sources (Mathison, 1988) was utilized.

Results

An analysis of the data revealed several findings related to a) classroom context, and b) the students' writing. The following findings were noted with regard to the classroom context:

- Particularly noteworthy was the teachers' use of a post-writing scaffolding strategy as the predominant method for supporting student growth.
- Other means of scaffolding children's writing were rarely evident.
- According to the teachers the post-writing scaffolding strategy was intentionally utilized to provide students with coaching within their zone of proximal development; however this strategy actually inhibited some children's writing performance.
- Little attempt was made on the part of the teacher to lead students' development or extend students' messages.
- There was no evidence of modeled writing or shared writing in a whole group setting.
- There was little or no evidence of big book reading with attention to elements of print.
- There was no consistent accountability of student writing, i. e., what students did while writing, whether they were engaged or not, and whether they shared their writing with the teacher.
- There was no audience besides the teacher.
- There was little talk between students while writing.
- There were erratic opportunities to write and no scheduled time to write.
- Journal writing was the second most frequent literacy event in the classroom after read aloud.

In addition to the above findings related to classroom context, the following results were noted regarding the children's writing:

- Of the 17 children examined, some made modest growth, while others made relatively little or no growth.
- Patterns in children's writing development emerged that were both typical of the findings of other research in this field and also idiosyncratic or unique to individual students.
- Large variations in children's writing fluency were observed.
- In general, students' writing topics came from their own life or school experiences.
- Drawing was a predominant feature of all children's writings.
- In a number of instances, students developed a repertoire early on of known words spelled conventionally, such as "love", "mom," "dad," "you," "yes," "no," names of siblings and friends.
- Even students who made progress perseverated on patterns for long periods of time.

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Coding Scheme for Analysis of Writing

The assessment of children's writing was performed by a leveling analysis procedure. Each sample was evaluated to determine which level best represented the predominant pattern of the child's written message. A level number was then assigned for that date.

Levels:

0	Uncodable
1	Drawing
2	Scribbling
3	Copied words or names
4	Random letter strings
5	Repeated letter patterns
6	Early Invented Spelling--one letter per syllable or word
7	Intermediate Invented Spelling--between one letter per syllable and full invented spelling
8	Full Invented Spelling--almost phonetic representation of each sound
9	Transitional Spelling--some full invented and some conventional spelling
10	Conventional Spelling
11	Cursive
+	picture-print match is evident (through teacher's written message or child's own discernible written message)
P	use of punctuation (attempted or conventional)

Data Overview Chart

Student	# of entries	entry level	exit level	range of dict. message	*range of written message	instances of coaching	Pattern
Louise (a.m.)	61	5	8	4 to 5	1 to 14	3	N
Karen (a.m.)	56	7	8		1 to 14	0	P
Kitty (a.m.)	60	7	8		1 to 36	1	P
Mary (a.m.)	43	4	6	1 to 6	1 to 5	2	P
Zeb (a.m.)	51	1	*4	4 to 14	1 to 9	7	P
Alex (a.m.)	54	2	8	3 to 7	2 to 9	0	P
Gary (a.m.)	45	4	8	1 to 14	1 to 7	0	P
Linda (a.m.)	38	6	6		1 to 9	1	P
Antonio (p.m.)	59	4	7	3 to 11	2 to 8	0	P
Matt (p.m.)	57	4	6	4 to 11	3 to 16	1	P
Mark (p.m.)	42	2	6	3 to 50	2 to 9	1	P
Bruce (p.m.)	41	*4	9	8 to 12	2 to 11	0	N
Patrice (p.m.)	65	*2	7	2 to 11	4 to 11	4	P
Nate (p.m.)	59	4	9	3 to 8	3 to 9	1	P
Kathy (p.m.)	59	2	7	1 to 18	1 to 10	6	N
Kris (p.m.)	53	4	4	3 to 32		3	P
Larry (p.m.)	72	2	8	1 to 36	2 to 10	0	P

*Written message may not match dictated message

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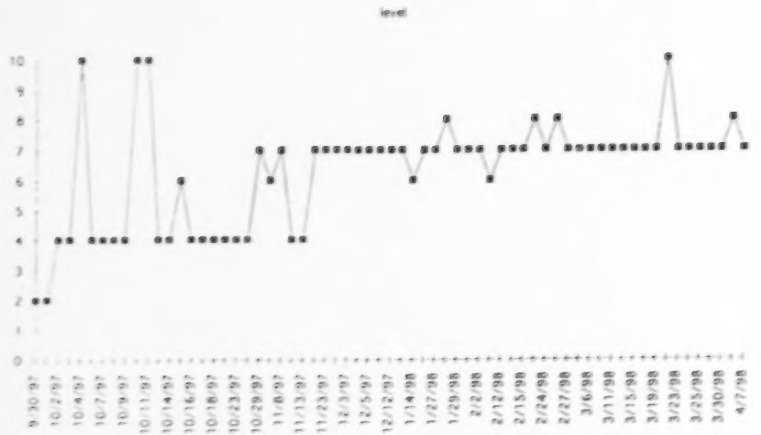
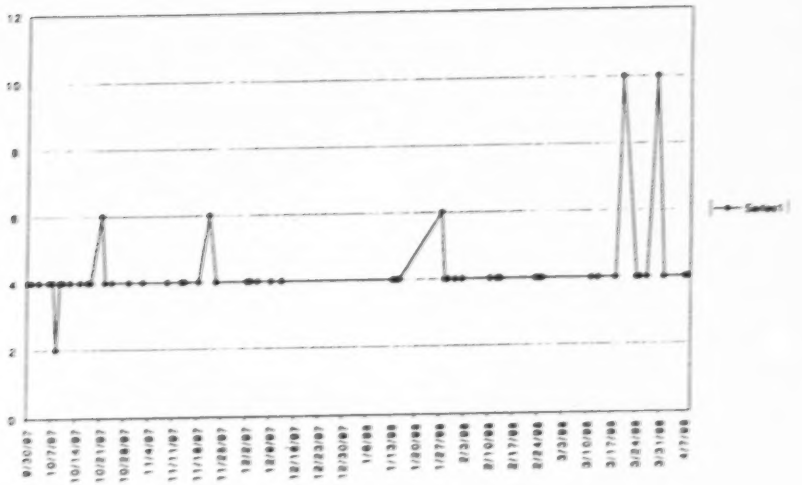
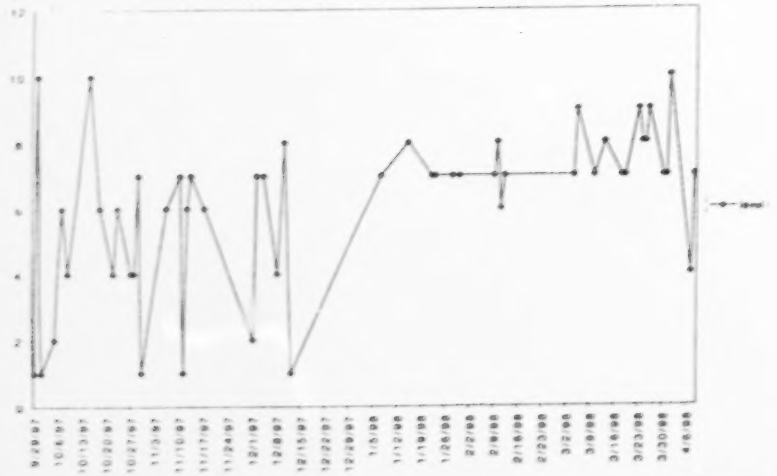
Patrice Chart



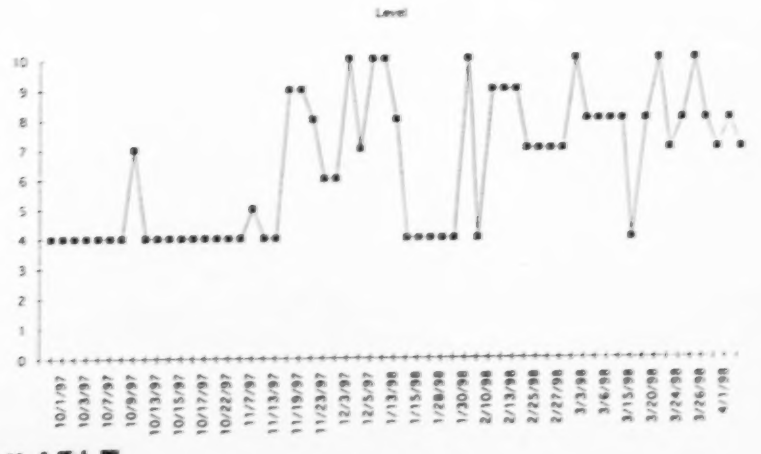
Kris



Zeb



Antonio Chart



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